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Understanding American Mexican Children

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In 1997, when we first met while independently conducting field work in Whitfield County, Georgia, and its county seat, Dalton, we heard from local principals and teachers that Latino students sometimes “disappeared” from the schools. Most of these who disappeared were immigrant students from Mexico and other Central American countries, students who had arrived suddenly in local schools while accompanying their parents who found jobs in the carpet and poultry mills of the area (Hamann, 2003; Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2000; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2009). The “disappearances” led one of us (Hamann, 2001) to develop a concept—the sojourner student—and draw from it various pedagogical/political conclusions. Using a few empirical facts—like the reported “disappearances” and survey results showing that about a quarter of Mexican newcomer parents were not confident that they would still be living in northwestern Georgia 3 years hence—but mainly conjecturing from a range of literature on transnational migration, Hamann hypothesized that, akin to the presence of students in the United States with prior Mexican school experience, there might be students in Mexican schools with prior U.S. school

Published (as Chapter 8) in *Regarding Educación: Mexican-American Schooling, Immigration, and Bi-national Improvement*, edited by Bryant Jensen & Adam Sawyer. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), pp 172–188.

<https://www.tcpress.com/regarding-educacion-9780807753927>

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experience. Very few scholars in the United States and none in Mexico previously reported that issue. One exception was Trueba (1999), who pointed out that some Mexican parents living in the United States decided to send their adolescent sons and daughters to Mexico to avoid some real or hypothetical risks associated with high school dynamics in the United States. Also, Mahler (1998) asked about the transnational experiences of international migrants' children. Thus, the fact and recognition that American schools host sojourner students still ongoing research project in Mexican schools a few years after our Georgian experience.

Fourteen years have passed since our first peripheral encounters with the students who were moving transnationally from one school system to another. Now we believe we have a better and more complicated idea of student movement between the United States and Mexico than we could articulate in that first sojourner student article (Hamann, 2001). The purposes of this chapter are, first, to sketch this more detailed picture of "American Mexican" students encountered in Mexican schools, and second, to summarize some of our main findings on that emergent schooling process. Finally, we will identify the most important, but not necessarily obvious, educational challenges that teachers, school officials, and educational policymakers have to face in the present and the near future in both the American and Mexican schools if they are to be responsive to these transnationally mobile students.

Gathering Data

The "disappeared" students from the U.S. schools were later found (or at least many of them were). We found them in Mexico by conducting surveys on representative samples of schools and students in four Mexican states. With support from the *Consejo Nacional de Ciencias y Tecnología* (CONACYT) and later the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*, we began in Nuevo Leon (2004), continued in Zacatecas (2005), then Puebla (2009), and most recently conducted surveys in Jalisco in 2010. In each state, surveys were conducted in November or December through visits to classrooms.

Collectively, in these four states, the *educación básica* (1st to 9th grades) enrollment was approximately 3,300,000 students attending

about 21,000 schools. Our four representative samples tallied 53,998 students. Most sampled students responded to a written questionnaire, except the younger ones (1st to 3rd grades). Given the fact that the younger ones would have less skill reading and writing and thus could not reliably respond to written questionnaires, we decided to organize a kind of collective oral interview for students in these grades that began with the following question: Who has studied in a U.S. school?

Complementing this quantitative approach, we conducted on-location observations at more than 100 schools from our quantitative sample, where we interviewed more than 140 students and 40 teachers. Typically these returns for observation and interviews were carried out in the spring months just after the November/December surveying. Most of these interviews were transcribed, resulting in over 1,000 pages of qualitative data to review and code. The quantitative surveys, our in-depth interviews with students and teachers, and our on-site observations constitute the sources of data we present in this chapter.

As a final introductory note, we should add that our research projects, first in Georgia, then in those four states in Mexico, have always used an inductive approach. We have learned from our interviews, surveys, observations, and discussions with educational actors step by step. In contrast to this step-by-step growth, the following sections offer a synthesis of our investigative journey.

Some Main Findings

From Sojourner Students to Transnational Children

The transnationally dislocated (and dislocatable) sojourner students do exist. We found them attending classrooms in Mexican schools. They told us they had attended U.S. schools in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, Texas, and 31 other states. We found 982 students with school experience in American schools who represented 1.8% of our sample. As a result, we estimated that there were about 69,500 students with U.S. school backgrounds in the four Mexican state school systems we sampled. Correlating the proportions of transnational students with the classification of international migration density that Mexico's census system already

calculates at the *municipio* (county) level, we were then able to estimate that 420,000 transnational students were enrolled in Mexico's national *educación básica* system (1st to 9th grades) as the second decade of the 21st century began.

Almost 4 out of 10 of those students with transnational school experiences were born in the United States, the rest, in Mexico. Simplifying the trajectories (and momentarily ignoring some revealing detail), we can say that most of the students born in the United States began their schooling in the United States and then they went to Mexico. The opposite happened with those who were born in Mexico. Most started in Mexican schools; then they attended American ones before returning to Mexican schools.

How should we refer to these students? Referencing the longstanding settler-versus-sojourner debate that has transpired in migration studies over the last decades, Hamann (2001) had identified them as *sojourners*. By doing this, he wanted to emphasize that biographically responsive schooling with these students would emphasize their past experiences and likely future need to not only code-switch (between languages) but to “culture switch” (Clemens, 1999), from one type of literacy to another, from one social context to another. His concern was to alert American educators to the special pedagogical condition of transient students who have particular needs (e.g., to be bilingual, to develop multiple literacies, and to negotiate geographically dislocated lives). Ultimately, sojourners “are neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ but at once *both* ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Smith, 1994, p. 17). The first analysis developed by Hamann had the purpose of discussing the common belief of American teachers that immigrant students are always and undoubtedly permanent settlers and, in consequence, what they need is to be prepared for a future life, as adults, in that specific local society where they are newly living. Critiquing those beliefs as sometimes misplaced, Hamann pointed out the paradoxical responsibility American teachers have when they recognize the fragmented trajectories of some of their students (i.e., the possibility that they would continue their schooling in the country of origin of their parents). The dilemma for the American teachers was fascinating: how should they educate students who were attending American schools to be successful if/when they continued their education in Mexico (or other Central American countries), as a hard-to-identify portion surely would? More abstractly, how should the schooling provided *here* pertain to a

student's future navigation of *there*, with *there* perhaps referencing more than one locale, more than one country, and more than one life phase?

From our first encounters in 2004 and 2005 with "sojourner students" in Nuevo Leon and Zacatecas, particularly when we had personal contacts with them, we witnessed that often they were bilingual and had deep experiences in being educated in American schools. Many felt as attached to the Mexican community where we had encountered them as to one or more locales in the United States. Most (75%) wished to return to continue their education in the United States. An important proportion of them (36%) identified themselves as "Mexican Americans," around 20% for those born in Mexico and 60% for those born in the United States (Hamann & Zúñiga, 2011). *Sojourner* may have described the biography of many of them, but it captured the cosmology of these students less well. So we decided a more neutral descriptive label was *transnational students* (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009; Zúñiga et al., 2008). These students had moved transnationally, and that fact had implications for how they had and would continue to negotiate school. While it was important earlier to emphasize the hazards of imagining these students as "settled;" the label *transnational* was, we hoped, less charged.

A recent analysis of our databases and interviews showed us the significance of three conditions that affect the lives, and school trajectories, of transnational children.

Legal status. The first condition (and the one we examined least) was the legal status of their parents and themselves while they lived in the United States. Our survey intentionally did not ask for the legal status of the respondents when they lived in the United States. However, we included one question that allows us indirectly to approach that issue: *Why did you and your family decide to return to Mexico?* Nonetheless, during interviews we had some transnational students who volunteered that immigration enforcement actions in the United States explained their returns to Mexico.

U.S. immigration enforcement had substantial consequences on some transnational students' vision of the past and their definition of their future (Zúñiga & Hamann, forthcoming). Transnational students who experienced legal restrictions on themselves and/or on their parents were more prone to develop pessimistic visions of their future

lives; they were less sure how to use for their own benefit what they learned and the competencies they acquired from American schools. That was particularly true for those who suffered, directly or indirectly, incarceration or deportation of their parents.

More complex was the situation of students born in the United States whose parents (both or one of them) were undocumented migrants still living in the United States. When we encountered them in Mexico, such students usually lived with grandparents and/or one of their parents, while the other parent, siblings, and/or extended family continued to labor in the United States. These students knew they were citizens in the United States (because of birthplace), knew they would have rights there as adults, but also knew their parents (or one of them) were at risk of being deported. Such students faced an odd sense of welcome/unwelcome in relation to the United States (Gitlin et al., 2003). The country that might play a key role in their future opportunities (and that may have been a crucial economic lifeline through remittances) was also the cause of the geographic bifurcation of their family. Particularly in Puebla we heard accounts from U.S.-born students (who ostensibly had the protection of American citizenship) who had been sent to Mexico to protect them from possible traumas that could be associated with their parents' detention and/or deportation (Sánchez García, Hamann, & Zúñiga, in press). Such students experientially overlap with the "left behind" children whom Dreby (2010) has so evocatively described—students who live with grandparents or extended family in Mexico while their parents (and sometimes younger siblings whom they have never met) live in the United States.

Not all U.S.-born transnational students whose parents lacked U.S. documentation were in Mexico because of enforcement regimes, however. Some children had neither a direct experience with deportation nor a fear related to an absent parent's legal vulnerability in the United States. Like U.S.-born transnational students' whose parents illegally worked or had worked in the United States, this subcategory could often aptly be referred to as "double national." For this type of transnational student, it made sense to be (or aspire to be) bilingual, to have spent years in the United States, and to appreciate several traits of their American experience. They could count on a network spread across two countries (of aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, etc.). They felt they belonged to a "transnational community" (Guerra, 1998), a territory and a society divided by national border, but that

transcended that border, too, as they could cross when they (or their parents) decided to. Such students seemed more capable than their transnational Mexican peers (students born in Mexico who had lived in the United States without authorization before returning to Mexico) to negotiate the bi-national opportunity structures and prospects for affiliation and attachment.

Early school experiences. The second salient condition concerned the country in which transnational students began their schooling, as the first school years became a hallmark and a reference for the following phases of the schooling process (Hamann & Zúñiga, 2011). Early school experiences were associated with the affiliation chosen by transnational students. In our two first surveys (Nuevo Leon and Zacatecas school systems) we asked the students to self-identify with one of three alternatives: (a) Mexican, (b) Mexican American, or (c) American. Then, for the Puebla and Jalisco surveys, we added indigenous identities to our list of possibilities. Especially in the case of Puebla, one of these identities—i.e., Mixteco—proved particularly popular.

Table 1 shows the relationship between early school experience and the identity affiliation selected by the students. Four findings should be highlighted. One is the existence of a few exceptional cases of students who started their schooling in Mexican schools but still declared themselves “American.” Second, the hyphenated Mexican American identity is well accepted even for the students who started the school in Mexico. Third, the American affiliation was more frequent for the students who began school in the United States, but even for them, it is exceptional. Finally, we have the case of students who declare

Table 1. Affiliation by the School System Where the Transnational Students Started Education

<i>Started School</i>	<i>Mexican</i>	<i>Mexican American</i>	<i>American</i>	<i>Mixteco/ Other Indigenous</i>	<i>Total</i>
In Mexico	68%	27%	1%	4%	100% (187)
In the U.S.	48%	39%	7%	6%	100% (516)
Total	53%	36%	5.5%	5.5%	100% (703)

Source: Nuevo Leon (2004), Zacatecas (2005), Puebla (2009), and Jalisco (2010) surveys. Universidad de Monterrey databases of transnational students attending 4th to 9th grade in Mexican schools ($n = 860$).

themselves to be Mixtecos (or Indians). This affiliation was much more frequent for Puebla students who were born in the United States and less commonly selected by those born in Puebla. Perhaps for those transnational students an ethnic identity that did not correspond with a nation-state (and with a school system that did not expect or accommodate their biography) was particularly appealing.

Years of U.S. schooling. A third salient factor was the amount of time spent in the United States. Some of the students in our sample attended only 1 or 2 school years in American schools, while others had spent almost all their school life in the United States. We present the distribution of the percentage of U.S. schooling years of transnational students from our four samples in Figure 1. Overall, a majority of the students in our sample of transnational students had spent more than a quarter of their school careers in one or more U.S. schools.

As expected, the percentage of schooling spent in the United States is associated with the student's self-reported native language. For

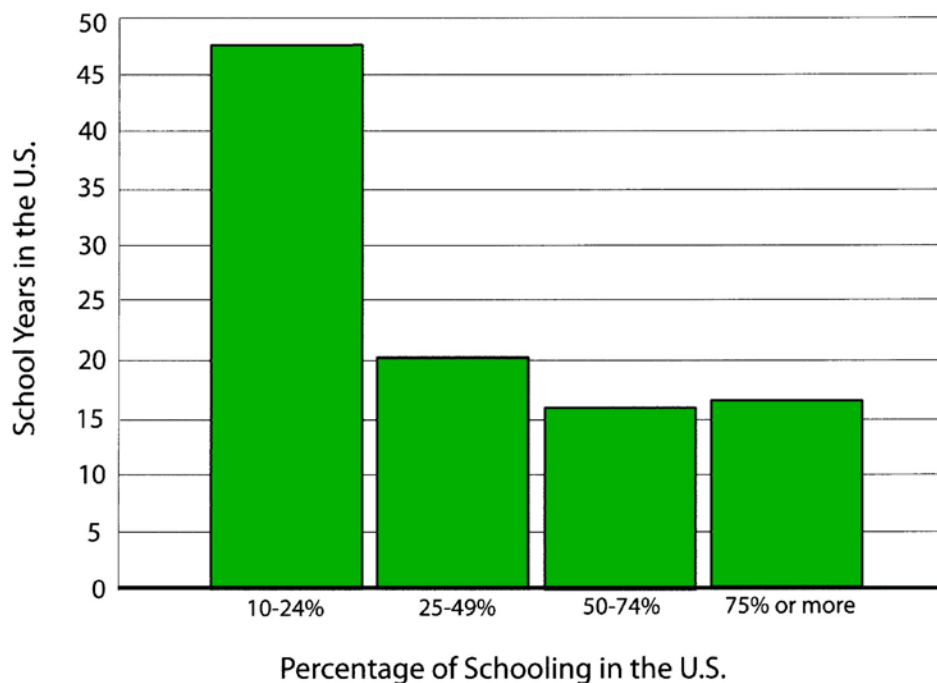


Figure 1. Four State Student Sample Distribution of Total Years in U.S. Schools. *Source:* Nuevo Leon (2004), Zacatecas (2005), Puebla (2009), and Jalisco (2010) surveys. Universidad de Monterrey databases of transnational students attending 4th to 9th grade in Mexican schools ($n = 860$).

instance, in Jalisco, where we met the largest number and proportion of transnational students, we compared the students with a high percentage of their school years in the United States (75% or more) with those who spent less than one-quarter of their school life in the United States. Only 23% of the first group stated that Spanish was their first language versus 67% for the latter group.

From Transnational Students to American Mexican Children

As already noted, through our surveys we met 982 transnational students; 122 of them were 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-graders, while the other 860 were attending 4th to 9th grades. Additionally, we encountered 460 students who had never attended school in the United States but who were born there. Let's listen to one of those children, Karla, whom we interviewed (in Spanish) in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, in February, 2011. She was enrolled in 7th grade (i.e., the first year of *secundaria*):

Interviewer 1: When did you come to Lagos, Karla?

Karla: I came here when I was almost four.

Interviewer 1: Wow, when you were very young!

Karla: Then I went back to Los Angeles when I was seven. I stayed there only for three months just before I got to the elementary school here in Lagos. I was there just to visit my uncles, aunts, and cousins. I did not go to the school in Los Angeles.

Interviewer 1: So, you never attended school in the U.S., did you?

Karla: No, I didn't.

Interviewer 2: But you were born there, weren't you?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer 1: So, all of your schooling has been here in Lagos.

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer 1: And your parents, where are they?

Karla: Here, in Lagos.

Interviewer 1: How many members are in your family?

Karla: My dad, my mom, two sisters, and I.

Interviewer 2: And were your sisters born in Los Angeles, too?

Karla: No, I'm the only one who was born in Los Angeles.

Interviewer 1: How do you feel? Do you feel Mexican or American?

Karla: No, Mexican!

Interviewer 1: Oh yeah? Why?

Karla: Because I've been living all my life here.

Interviewer 1: Do you speak English?

Karla: No.

Interviewer 2: Do you ever want to study in the U.S.?

Karla: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Are you sure? What would you want to study there?

Karla: Tourism or hotel management.

Interviewer 1: Do you have an idea where you want to study in the U.S.?

Karla: I would like, well, I've been in Los Angeles, I would like to study in Los Angeles or in Las Vegas.

Interviewer 1: In Las Vegas ... do you have members of your family in Las Vegas?

Karla: Uncles. There are my father's cousins. I also have other uncles, my mother's brothers. But they are in Chicago. I also have my cousins in Los Angeles.

Interviewer 2: Do you visit regularly with your family in Los Angeles?

Karla: No ... because when I was little I could do this, but now I don't think I can because I don't have a Mexican passport. I have an American passport, so I can go there, but then I couldn't come back.

Interviewer 1: No, you can enter [to Mexico] as an American. Or you can get the Mexican passport.

Karla: Well, my godmother, who lives there [Los Angeles], wants me to go next summer for vacation, and she told me she is going to get my passport (from Mexico).

Interviewer 1: Do you know the nationalities you have?

Karla: Nationalities? How?

Interviewer 1: You are American, aren't you?

Karla: Yeah.

Interviewer 2: Because you were born there. Are you also Mexican?

Karla: Yes, because my father and my mother are Mexicans.

Interviewer 1: So, you know it very well!

Karla: Yep.

Interviewer 1: Where will you want to live when you grow up?

Karla: There, in the United States, in Los Angeles.

Whereas Karla had not been socialized in U.S. schools as were her transnational peers at her school, the United States formed an important part of her imagined (or future) social world. We had decided to interview her because the principal thought Karla was one of the transnational students at the school, though Karla did not speak any English. She had spent less than 4 years of her life in Los Angeles, nearly all as a young child, other than the 3 months she spent visiting her extended family. Even so, it was very clear to Karla that she was legally an American and, consequently, that she had the right to reside in the United States.

Paradoxically, it was unclear to her, before our interview, that she was also a legal Mexican (though she immediately identified culturally as a Mexican). She even thought that she would have trouble getting back into Mexico because she lacked a Mexican passport, until the interviewers explained to her that she had the right to also have a Mexican passport. She knew she had two nationalities. Although she identified as Mexican, she anticipated an adult life in the United States, which sets up two long-standing questions of our research: How well do Mexican schools prepare students for adult life in U.S. society? And how *should they* do so?

Our surveys found 460 students born in the United States without school experience in the American schools. In addition, we encountered 366 other U.S. citizens by birthplace who had spent several years in the American schools. Together they represent 1.5% of our sample. We estimate that as of this writing (late 2011) there are approximately 50,000 children in Jalisco, Puebla, Zacatecas, and Nuevo Leon imagining their futures as adults in the United States like Karla did. The total tally of U.S. citizens (by birth) might be around 330,000 students in the whole Mexican school system. These students are double nationals, and many know how profitable/helpful that could be.

The case of Karla is not exceptional. She only reminded us (thanks to the principal's mix-up) what we had already observed before in Puebla, Zacatecas, and Nuevo Leon. Double national children are often

aware of their rights. They more readily imagine themselves doing their vocational or professional studies in U.S. colleges and know well that they can count on their parents', grandparents', uncles', aunts', or cousins' support for achieving this goal. Those findings explain another terminological change on our part: why we have supplemented our *transnational students* label with a partially overlapping one: *American Mexican children*. The latter encompass a new generation of Americans who are being socialized in Mexican schools. Many of these American Mexican children do not culturally identify as Americans (there is little in their Mexican schooling that would reinforce such an identification); still, they are aware of their legal identity and its ensuing implications for their future economic security and place of residence.

(In)visible Educational Challenges

Transforming from Invisibility to Visibility

From our earliest field work in Georgia and then in Nuevo Leon, we have learned just how invisible the geographies and cosmologies of these *sojourner-transnational-American-Mexican* students are. In American schools they automatically become *English Learners*, *English as Second Language Students*, *Limited English Proficient Students*, and/or whatever other linguistic label du jour is applied that obscures much of the rest of who they are. Sometimes, these students also get counted as *Latinos* or *Hispanics*. Sometimes, if their parents are involved in American food production, they are (in the United States) labeled as *Migrant students*, but this references a particular federal program that is a synonym for poverty and mobility more than for transnationalism. Rarely are they seen as *Mexican American* or *American Mexican* children.

Thus, we understand the principal's reaction in a North Carolina school when one of us visited in March 2005. It experienced a sudden demographic transformation over just 2 years. In that community, the turkey-processing industry had attracted thousands of Latino workers and their families. The principal did not know what to do. When we visited we saw a school with more than 40% of students speaking

Mexican Spanish in the cafeteria, but the only language aide the school had found was a teacher who came from Spain as part of an agreement signed by one Spanish university and the school district. As expected, the young teacher from Spain did not have much of an idea as to what to do. She had never been to Mexico. The Mexican American students had fun hearing the Spanish and the English accent of their unique bilingual teacher in the school. When one of us told the principal that some of their students likely would return to Mexico, she admitted that she had never thought of that. Immediately, she sent an e-mail to her staff telling them not to prohibit the use of Spanish by students. In a modest but real way, our side comment made the invisible visible. She had discovered that ELL students might be transnational students, and that changed the calculus of what they needed to know.

The situation in Mexican schools for transnational students is similar—i.e., they are invisible—but for other reasons. The returnees' children seem to have few differences with their peers in the schools. They have the same surnames; they speak Mexican Spanish (often less well). Acknowledging the physiological heterogeneity of any population, they nonetheless “look Mexican.” As we found transnational students during our school visits, we often encountered teachers who revealed their surprise when they saw their student converse ably in English. They did not realize they had that kind of student in their classrooms. Only in the small towns with a long history of international migration (e.g., in Jalisco) did teachers and principals know well who the *alumnos migrantes* (transnational students) were. They were aware of it because they knew their parents and other family members. By revealing these invisibilities, our projects have had one particularly important outcome: announcing that such students exist.

Training Teachers

Certainly, evidence matters. Transnational, American Mexican children exist and are attending Mexican and American schools. However, teachers both in the United States and in Mexico have frequently told us that they have little of the necessary training for working with these emergent realities. In Zacatecas, when we were interviewing

teachers, we learned a valuable lesson: teachers told us they wanted to help. They wanted to support and be useful to transnational students, but did not know what to do. The teachers recognized they never had the opportunity to visit American schools (and likely would not) and that they did not speak, read, and write English. They felt unprepared to imagine how their students had fared during their education in the United States.

In one of our last visits to Puebla, that state's Secretary of Education asked one of us what kind of training the teachers of Puebla needed to understand and address the needs of transnational students. With limited time, we responded, "Teachers in Puebla need to acquire some knowledge they usually lack. This includes: (a) knowing American schools-their foundations, dynamics, evaluation practices, moral and pedagogical practices; (b) learning basic English, including speaking, reading, and writing; (c) designing a transitional period for newcomers/returnees; and (d) welcoming the school biography and background of their transnational students." Of course, this is easier said than done. Almost all Mexican teachers are monolingual. They know little about American schools. It is difficult for them to comprehend the educational experiences of their students in the United States, and Mexican schools strongly communicate nationalistic views in their curriculum and instructional practices (Rippberger & Staudt, 2003). This reality makes it difficult for teachers in Mexico to appreciate and welcome the identities and learning of their American Mexican students (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2008).

Similar statements might be said about U.S. teachers. Generally, they know little about what Mexican schools are like and, with exceptions, see little need to learn more (Hamann, 2003). Because of this stance, American teachers often underestimate the *funds of knowledge* (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) their transnational students bring to the schools. These teachers are also almost always monolingual, even those who are responsible for the ESL programs. Their nationalism perhaps manifests itself differently than that of those we observed in Mexican schools (Rippberger & Staudt, 2003), but for them, too, the premise that schooling should account for a student living in another country, in the past and/or future, does not seem to fall within their realm of concern.

Encountering Multiple Literacies and Localities

What became clear for us through this research is that standardized schooling is not appropriate for the educational needs of children who are moving between locales and nations. Many have contested the premise of one-size-fits-all, but we would argue that this is particularly poorly suited for transnational students. Our point is not only to defend the values of preserving language competencies that American Mexican students develop. Certainly, we met several kids who fear they will forget their English, though some continue using English with their brothers, sisters, friends, aunts, and grandmothers. But from our perspective, bilingualism is not the primary issue.

Literacy, as Guerra (1998) pointed out, is not only the ability to be proficient in one written language, it is also the capacity to read contexts and to engage effectively in a variety of social practices. For instance, bilingual kids of Mexican or Central American parents in the United States develop interpretation skills in adult interactions, as Valdes (2003) and Orellana (2009) have shown in their groundbreaking studies on young children. Equally, American Mexican children of rural parents, when they return (or come for the first time in their lives) to Mexico, develop the ability to understand rural community dynamics they could not imagine when they lived in metropolitan Atlanta, New York, or Los Angeles. Moreover, and more generally, these kids have to master two different national histories, two different political organizations, two different symbolic geographies, and so on. And very often they have to develop such abilities and knowledge while being members of working-class families who possess very little cultural capital and have a history of limited school experience.

From the beginning of our field work in Mexican schools, we learned from the American Mexican students that many faced troubles in transitioning from English literacy to Spanish literacy. In other words, they had problems in reading and writing Spanish with cognitive academic language proficiency, a problem obscured usually by their basic interpersonal communication skills learned at home and in the community. Mexican schools had no standardized test for evaluating the students' needs in acquiring the necessary skills for reading and writing Spanish in those children. The mix-up is, in this case, almost perfect. Given the fact that transnational children speak

Mexican Spanish almost like their peers in the school, teachers believe that they read and write Spanish like their peers. Sometimes, the teachers found that transnational students do not read well and make several mistakes while writing. But this performance data did not produce particularly appropriate actions from the teachers, being misunderstood, for example, as proof that a student was slow, quiet, or inattentive.

Recently, Panait (2011) followed three junior high school students in a small town in Nuevo Leon to observe their literacy “transitions” from English to Spanish. She discovered there were no “transitions;” but rather ruptures and contradictions. The students (who spent half of their school year in Minnesota and the other half in Nuevo Leon) not only faced several obstacles in reading Spanish, but more important, they did not understand the basic rules of Spanish grammar and orthography. For instance, the vowel “a” in Spanish—given the vastly different pronunciation from its English counterpart—constitutes a colossal challenge for them while the consonant “h” is viewed almost as absurd sign because it is a useless letter in Spanish, and so on.

Conclusions

As a result of these findings, we are developing and recommending to school officials in several states in Mexico that they use evaluation guides, transitional programs, and short training activities that we have designed for supporting teachers and principals in the schools with higher concentrations of returnees’ children (Sánchez García et al., 2011). Our purpose is to raise awareness of the existence of American Mexican children, to argue for schooling that is more responsive to mobility (particularly transnational mobility), and to facilitate the literacy transitions of those American Mexican children. Fortunately, American Mexican students are not randomly dispersed in the geography of Mexico, but instead are concentrated in the *municipios*—regions similar in size and governance to U.S. counties—already identified as having higher participation in international migration. There are specific places where making American Mexican children more visible and arguing for seeing their backgrounds as assets to be built upon would be particularly advantageous.

Raising Mexican teachers' awareness of American Mexican students is an important step, but hardly the only one necessary if Mexican and American educational systems are going to catch up to the demographic realities of mobility between the two countries. The American task for the binationally mobile student can no longer be rationalized as purely assimilative (if it ever could have been), because it is not a foregone conclusion that the Mexican American/American Mexican student being taught will come to adulthood and stay in the locale or even the country of their current schooling. The task for Mexico and the United States is bigger than just becoming aware of the fact that several hundred thousand such students exist. In a 21st century that will be marked by continued economic globalization and mobility, these transnational students are prospectively parts of a transformational bi-national, bilingual, bicultural, cosmopolitan vanguard, but for this opportunity to be realized, teacher preparation, curricula, and other targets of educational policies will need to be rethought. The facts on the ground are changing, and so, too, should the schools (*de aquí y de allá*).

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